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Endurance Running as Gesture in Contemporary Theatre and Performance

What happens when the act of running migrates across bodies, situations and aesthetics? And how is running being mobilized in contemporary theatre and performance? Athletic bodies have long been represented in figurative art, but sustained performative explorations of the act and action of running are a more recent phenomenon. In employing running bodies in and as art, artists have responded to the emergence of recreational endurance running as a global mass participation sport and its increasing visibility as a body-cultural practice, as well as the possibilities running opens up for engaging with the broader 'sport spectacle'.[1] But how are theatre and performance makers employing running bodies and how might this contribute to emerging inter-disciplinary dialogues around running and its cultures? In this essay I propose the notion of gesture as a lens for investigating how performances of running explore a potent dynamic that exists between the running body as spectacle, the running body as generator of kinesthetic sensation and the running body as initiator of affective response. Gesture mediates between the biological and the social and between the athletic and the artistic, and offers a way of perceiving the expressive and performative potential of running as art.

Exploring how running might operate gesturally is important in articulating what running does in and as performance, while also establishing how performance

[1] See Jennifer Doyle, 'Dirt off Her Shoulders', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 19.4 (2013), 419–33.

itself might contribute to the emerging interdisciplinary field of 'running studies'. In running performances, the artist's running body, or the act of witnessing running bodies, or the experience of one's own body in motion, serves as a potent and productive means of intervening in the coupling of running and meaning. As an ordinary mode of embodiment running appears repetitive and instrumental with its expressive and gestural potential constrained. Runners' bodies – in the act of running – can seem closed, locked into the maintenance of their rhythm and pace. Running is also closely associated with suffering, pain and punishment. It is a useful mechanism for disciplining and training bodies through the strict regulation it imposes. But through artistic intervention, these associations can be questioned and the habitual routines of the running body can be rendered gestural, opening the running body up to serve as a communicative medium. This, as I will argue, is important in developing the expressive possibilities of running and the participative scope of live art and performance. In what follows I first outline the broader context in which running performances have developed, before discussing the concept of gesture. I then consider three recent running performances where gesture is operational in different ways: *Run For Your Life* (2015) produced by Sweden's Riksteatern, *Fun Run* (2009 – present) by the Australian company All the Queens Men and Welsh performance artist Eddie Ladd's *Ras Goffa Bobby Sands / The Bobby Sands Memorial Race* (2009). In all three, running bodies generate durational and relational events that invite participants and spectators to share in embodied experiences of presence, celebration, and resistance, and question conventional understandings of running-as-sport. But, as case studies, each renders running gestural in different ways and to different degrees: as a relay, *Run For Your Life*

resembles most closely the features of mass participation road races; by contrast, *Fun Run*, presents a more expressive and exuberant performance of running focused on a solo runner; *Ras Goffa Bobby Sands / The Bobby Sands Memorial Race* also presents a sole running figure, but offers a detailed choreographic deconstruction of the gestural action chain of running.

Running as a body-cultural practice

In 2004 the sports sociologist John Bale observed that, 'as a body-cultural phenomenon running has eluded serious study in the humanities and social sciences.'[2] This is no longer the case. While the study of running continues to be dominated by the behavioural and physiological sciences, Bale's book *Running Cultures: Racing in Time and Space* (2004) is now part of an expanding literature investigating running as a practice with a significance well beyond that of institutionalized sport. Bale's critical humanistic study examined running as a body-cultural practice via representations of athletes and the spaces and places in which running occurs. Other work on running now discusses its anthropological and historical dimensions; analyses how media representations of specific runners reinforce or contest dominant ideologies of gender, race and national identity; explores the sensuous and visceral experiences produced by running bodies including issues of injury and pain and connections with landscape and nature; and examines the implication of running events in geo-politics and postcolonial

[2] John Bale, *Running Cultures: Racing in Time and Space* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

relations.[3] In addition, an expansive popular non-fiction literature now explores personal experiences of running and reflects on its broader cultural significance.[4]

This expanded interest in the socio-cultural and experiential dimensions of endurance running has been driven by its increasing popularity and visibility as well as through the diversification of *who* is running and *how* they are running. Through the 1960s and '70s endurance running was increasingly deinstitutionalized and informalized as runners moved beyond athletics tracks and club contexts to take to roads, parks and public spaces.[5] The invention and popularization of 'jogging' – a sustained, slow, and low intensity form running – as an everyday fitness practice in the 1960s gradually normalized the appearance of running bodies in public spaces.[6]

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[3] See, for instance, Dennis M. Bramble and Daniel E. Lieberman, 'Endurance Running and the Evolution of Homo', *Nature*, 432 (2004), 345–52; Thor Gotaas, *Running: a global history* (London: Reaktion, 2012); William Bridel, Pirkko Markula, and Jim Denison, *Endurance Running: A Socio-Cultural Examination* (London: Routledge, 2015); Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, 'Running the Routes Together Corunning and Knowledge in Action', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 37.1 (2008), 38–61; Hayden Lorimer, 'Surfaces and Slopes', *Performance Research*, 17.2 (2012), 83–86; Debbie Lisle, 'Exotic Endurance: Tourism, Fitness and the Marathon Des Sables', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34.2 (2015), 263-281; Vybarr Cregan-Reid author, *Footnotes: How Running Makes Us Human* (London: Ebury Press, 2016).

[4] See, for instance, Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* (London: Harvill Secker, 2008); Christopher McDougall, *Born to Run: The Rise of Ultra-Running and the Super-Athlete Tribe* (London: Profile, 2008); Adharanand Finn, *The Way of the Runner: A Journey into the Fabled World of Japanese Running* (New York: Pegusus Books, 2016; Michelle Orange, *This is Running for Your Life* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013); Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams Essays* (London: Granta, 2014).

[5] Jeroen Scheerder, Koen Breedveld, and Julie Borgers, 'Who Is Doing a Run with the Running Boom? The Growth and Governance of One of Europe's Most Popular Sport Activities', in *Running across Europe: The Rise and Size of One of the Largest Sport Markets*, ed. by Jeroen Scheerder, Koen Breedveld, and Julie Borgers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

[6] For an account of the history of jogging, see Alan Latham, 'The History of a Habit: Jogging as a Palliative to Sedentariness in 1960s America', *Cultural Geographies*, 22.1 (2015), 103–26.

In the 1970s and 80s the so-called first running 'wave' saw explosive growth in the numbers of active runners and running events. Beginning in the United States and spreading to Europe, the first wave saw a surge in the numbers of participants entering marathons and large urban road races (or 'fun runs').[7] After a period of stagnation, a second 'wave' beginning at the end of the 1990s and continuing to the present day has seen a further significant increase in the global number of participants in endurance running events.[8] The growth experienced in this second wave has been driven by an increase in women's participation as well as a greater take up of running amongst those of middle age. The second running wave has also seen an increasing diversity in *how* people run. In addition to traditional distances and event formats like 5 km and 10 km road races, and half marathons (21.098 km) and marathons (42.195 km), off-road trail and fell runs, ultramarathons (events over the standard marathon distance of 42.2 km), and other forms of commercialized non-traditional running event are now increasingly popular. In *Running Cultures*, Bale distinguishes between the dominant 'work-like' nature of 'achievement' and 'welfare' running – with their focus on quantification (whether that be race results and times, or fitness data) – versus the playfulness of running as an end in itself. The latter, which might be better understood as 'experience-oriented' running, is an

[7] In the decade between 1974 and 1984, the number of marathon finishers worldwide almost multiplied by 18. Scheerder, Breedveld, and Borgers, p. 8.
[8] Between 2001 and 2012, for instance, the numbers of finishers in just the world's 20 largest road races worldwide almost doubled from 866,000 to 1,594,000. See Scheerder, Breedveld, and Borgers, 10. From the mid 1990s to the early 2000s the number of finishers in all U.S. running events more than doubled. Running USA, *2013 State of the Sport - Part III: U.S. Race Trends*, 28 July 2013 <http://www.runningusa.org/state-of-sport-2013-part-III> [accessed 28 November 2013]. URL no longer active.

important and growing dimension in endurance running.[9] Running generates intense awareness of the body's physiological processes, and of shifting mental and emotional states, and produces a heightened haptic engagement with the environment and with others. Large city fun runs and marathons offer the opportunity to gather with hundreds or thousands of other runners, contributing to, and consuming, the spectacle of massed movement while enjoying a carnival-like atmosphere. Beyond urban environments, trail and fell running offer experiences of intense engagement with landscape and terrain, emphasizing corporeal experience over standardization and records, while ultramarathons provide more difficult endurance challenges. Trail, fell and ultramarathon running can be considered part of the growth of 'post-sport' physical cultural practices including yoga and Parkour, that foreground sensual experience, desire and experiences of flow and *jouissance* over competition and performance.[10]

Artists are playing an important but underacknowledged role in exploring the experiential and expressive dimensions of running. Recognizing the potential of running as a site of creative practice and research, artists have made strong links between running, art and performance through works that frequently explore the dynamic that exists between the running body as communicative medium and the

[9] See, for example, Matti Tainio, 'Artification of Sport: The Case of Distance Running', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 10.4 (2012). <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=641> [accessed 31 January 2014].

[10] Michael Atkinson, 'Fell Running in Post-sport Territories', *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 2.2 (2010): 109–32 (112-13). It is worth noting the development of a number of commercial event formats like the Tough Mudder, Colour Run and Electric Run as well as the growth of the socially-oriented Parkrun organization as further examples of the growth of experience-oriented running.

running body as source of sensual, visceral experience. Scottish Arts charity NVA's visually arresting performance *Speed of Light*, first staged on Arthur's Seat and the Salisbury Crags in Edinburgh as part of the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival and the London 2012 Festival, offered the spectacle of around 150 runners moving through darkened landscapes to create choreographed patterns in specially-designed light emitting suits. As a staged encounter between runners, a walking audience, and the landscape, *Speed of Light* offered a meditation on energetic embodiment and corporeal co-operation.[11] The physiological demands running makes on the body, and the intense energetics of running bodies, have been given audible expression in James Steventon and Jason Singh's *A Song for Eurydice* (2013). In this performance the heart rate of a runner on a treadmill set the tempo for an evolving musical composition, which in turn affected the runner's heart rate, generating a feedback loop between runner and composer. In *Cistemaw Iyiniw Ohci* (2001), multidisciplinary indigenous artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle re-enacted the running journeys of the Cree man, Cistemaw Iyiniw, 'who delivered tobacco from community to community to ask for their attendance and support at ceremonies.'[12] More than an act of physical endurance, L'Hirondelle's run from one end to the other of the Makwa Sahgaiehcan Reserve in Northern Seskatchewan to the other sought to engage an indigenous community via its cultural heritage. In *Breathing is Free: 12,*

[11] See Tim Edensor and Hayden Lorimer, '"Landscapism" at the Speed of Light: Darkness and Illumination in Motion', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 97.1 (2015): 1–16. *Speed of Light* was subsequently re-worked and re-staged in Salford Quays, Yokohama and the Ruhr Valley during 2012 and 2013.
[12] Candice Hopkins, 'E-Misférica', *E-Misférica: Aboriginal Performance*, (2005) <https://hemi.nyu.edu/journal/2_1/hopkins2.html> [accessed 24 September 2018]. Thanks to Jennifer Doyle for bringing L'Hirondelle's work to my attention.

756.3, a series of durational events undertaken since 2007, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba has used his own running journeys as a metaphor and a means of inscription. With the stated aim of running the diameter of the earth to highlight the experience of forced migrant journeys, Nguyen-Hatsushiba has used GPS technology to record his routes and generate large-scale images and drawings. Carali McCall has also focused on the inscriptive dimension of running and the links between running and drawing in a series of live and recorded performances since 2010 that involve her own strenuous bodily effort in running lines through urban and rural landscapes.[13]

These performances involving running bodies have to date received little sustained scholarly attention and the discourse on running art and performance is certainly underdeveloped, especially in comparison to that addressing walking art. Gregg Whelan has noted the strong parallels between endurance running and durational performance events and argued for the potential of endurance running as a mode and site of performance-based research.[14] But it is the artist, curator and researcher Kai Syng Tan who has done the most in seeking to develop an interdisciplinary discourse around running art and performance. Tan's key contention is that running bodies are physical and metaphorical vehicles for

[13] Two important precursors to the examples discussed in this paragraph are Yvonne Rainer's *We Shall Run* (1963), featuring running as ordinary movement, and Rex Cramphorn's Grotowoski-inspired *10, 000 Miles Away* (1970), which used running as a rhythmic and exhausting action. Running has also featured in the work of artists including Martin Creed, Blast Theory, Vicki Weitz, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Marnix de Nijs and MAP Office (Gutierrez + Portefaix), Ahmed Basiony, Nestori Syrjälä, Katye Coe and Hetty Blades, and Burn the Curtain. The Gardzienice Theatre Association's use of 'night-running' is an important instance of running as a technique in performance training. See Paul Allain, *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 55-57.

[14] Gregg Whelan, 'Running Through a Field', *Performance Research*, 17.2 (2012): 114.

connection, moving us across borders and between identities and discourses. Her 2014 one-day RUN! RUN! RUN! International Festival of Running (r3fest), curated with geographer Alan Latham, and her subsequent RUN! RUN! RUN! Biennales of 2016 and 2018, have expressed this contention through bringing together arts practitioners, academics and representatives from charities and running-related organizations to participate in deliberately juxtaposed seminars, workshops and artworks.[15] Tan's work has encouraged conversations and connections across disciplines and it is in this context of a nascent interdisciplinary discourse on running that I think the concept of gesture offers an important means of understanding what running does, and what is at stake, when bodies run as art. This is because gesture offers a way of attending to the performativity of running art and, more broadly, understanding how performance, art, and creativity might widen possibilities for physical activity more generally.[16]

Performing Gesture

Gesture is useful as a guiding concept and critical lens because it occupies a crucial area between human anatomy and cultural practice; as organized kinesis, gesture is both a motor phenomenon and part of the cultural world.[17] A gesture is an act of

[15] See Latham, Alan, and Kai Syng Tan. 'Running into Each Other: Run! Run! Run! A Festival and a Collaboration', *Cultural Geographies*, 24.4 (2017), 625-30; see also Kai Syng Tan, 'An Exploration of Running as Metaphor, Methodology, Material through the RUN! RUN! RUN! Biennale #r3fest 2016', *Sport in Society*, 22.5 (2019), 829-45.
[16] On this latter point, see Matti Tainio, 'Contemporary Physical Activities: The Aesthetic Justification', *Sport in Society*, 22.5 (2019), 846-60.
[17] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 132.

communicative expression, because a gesture must be read or interpreted in terms of its cultural significance, beyond the dictates of biology. Vilém Flusser defines gesture as 'a movement of the body or of a tool connected to the body for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation.'[18] By this, Flusser argues that gestures exceed the explanatory power of simple causation and are instead symbolic movements linked to intention. Because a gesture 'expresses a subjectivity' it is, to some extent, 'a movement that expresses a freedom.'[19] Flusser's understanding of gesture in part echoes that of Giorgio Agamben, who sees in gesture the revealing of human potentiality. For Agamben, however, this potentiality is removed from questions of intention. Agamben regards gesture as a third category of action beyond the classical categories of 'poiesis' and 'praxis'. If 'praxis' designates actions which are an ends in themselves, and 'poiesis' designates actions which produce an ends, then gesture makes means visible as means: '*The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such*. It allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human being and thus it opens the ethical dimension for them.'[20] In the essay 'Notes on Gesture', Agamben suggests that 'what characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported'.[21] This implies that to render an otherwise ends-directed action gestural we need to make it inoperative in some

[18] Vilém Flusser, *Gestures*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 3.
[19] Ibid., 163.
[20] Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetto and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 58. Italics in original.
[21] Ibid., 57.

way, detaching it from its ends. In film, literature and dance this is often achieved through interruption, repetition, or the defamiliarization of a particular motor action by slowing it down or speeding it up. Deviation from assumed norms of performance, decontextualizing and/or recontextualizing actions in situational or narrative terms, also render movement acts gestural. Erdem Gündüz's act of standing still in Istanbul's Taksim Square in 2013 after it had been violently cleared of protesters is one example of deviation from the behavioural norms of public space that assumed a gestural potency. In their introduction to a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* on 'Gesture, Theatricality and Protest', editors Jenny Hughes and Simon Parry read Gündüz's gesture through a double sense of the term *composure*; the gesture displayed steadiness in the face of threat, but was also carefully authored. Gündüz's act of interrupting movement and standing still was composed in relation to space, time and political situation. Bodies in action may also be re-composed and rendered gestural through artistic intervention. In her series *Atomists* (1996), Mexican-born artist Gabriel Orozco's uses the convergence of different media to render footballers' bodies gestural.[22] By painting different circular forms over newspaper images of footballers, Orozco partially obscures the context and purpose of the footballers' actions. By breaking up the bodies visually and removing the ends-oriented quality of the athletes' acts, the re-framed bodies become expressive of feeling and reveal how movement itself possesses a media-character.

[22] See Jill Bennett, 'Aesthetics of Intermediality', *Art History*, 30.3 (2007), 432–50.

Human movement is composed of gestural routines which are inscribed on the body as learned techniques. In his influential essay 'Techniques of the Body' (1935), Marcel Mauss analyses how such techniques, including sleeping, walking, running and swimming, are citational and a means through which authority is inscribed on the body.[23] Carrie Noland begins with Mauss' insights in her exploration of the performativity of gesture in *Agency and Embodiment* (2009). Noland identifies that, in producing a gesture, a body also experiences the sensation of movement the gesture produces, opening up the potential for reflexivity. For Noland, 'kinesthetic knowledge gained through gestural performance both permits the acquisition of […] durable norms and introduces the possibility of realizing a potential beyond them'. [24] Noland argues that, 'A gesture is a performative—it generates an acculturated body for others—and, at the same time, it is a performance—it engages the moving body in a temporality that is rememorative, present, and anticipatory all at once'.[25] Crucially, Noland argues that in performing a gesture, expressive or aesthetic concerns can be eclipsed by the experience of gesturing itself.[26] 'By focusing on the sensations produced by acts of gesturing,' writes Noland, 'the subject momentarily detaches movement from meaning, thereby recognizing that movement and meaning might be coupled in different ways.'[27] In the production of learned gestures or techniques, Noland identifies a 'moment of negativity' and a 'force of nonidentity'

[23] Marcel Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body', trans. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society*, 2.1 (1973): 70–88.
[24] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 15.
[25] Ibid., 17.
[26] Ibid., 207.
[27] Ibid., 54.

that means gesture is a potential resource for resisting homogenization.[28] Gesture, following Noland, is 'differential'[29], allowing for difference through the way each particular body bears and produces the gesture in question.

Noland's persuasive account of the performativity of gesture, and the importance of kinesthesia, opens up an understanding of how gesture functions in culture. Re-phrasing Noland's idea of gesture as agentic, Lucia Ruprecht observes that 'we *do things with gesture*.'[30] Ruprecht describes gesture as possessing agency not through avoiding an act, but through performing it differently: 'it possesses an agency that might be called '*acting otherwise*'.[31] That is, purposefully experimenting with the performance of existing gestural routines can open up possibilities for new spaces, actions and responses. Being citational, gesture also complicates linear temporalities and invites response. Rebecca Schneider evokes the image of a 'live stepping foot' as both living and artefactual, constituting difference and yet 'reiterative of long chains of actions'.[32] Schneider argues that the performance of gesture opens up an interval that – following Brecht – invites critical reappraisal, or the possibility of sameness and difference.[33] The three works of running performance I discuss in more detail in this essay use this gestural 'acting otherwise' of running to open up spaces for rethinking and reexperiencing athletic bodies. In

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[28] Carrie Noland, 'Introduction', in *Migrations of Gesture*, ed. Sally Ann Ness and Carrie Noland (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xiii
[29] Ibid., 3.
[30] Lucia Ruprecht, 'Introduction: Towards an Ethics of Gesture', *Performance Philosophy*, 3.1 (2017): 6.
[31] Ibid. Italics in original.
[32] Rebecca Schneider and Lucia Ruprecht, 'In Our Hands: An Ethics of Gestural Response-Ability. Rebecca Schneider in Conversation with Lucia Ruprecht', *Performance Philosophy*, 3.1 (2017): 111.
[33] Ibid., 111-12.

these performances the specific action chain of running isn't always interrupted, but rather, through reframing and recontextualizing acts of running, and citing other historic and mythic runners, these performances render the ordinary action of running – an action more frequently thought of as instrumental, repetitive and inexpressive – gestural. In so doing they loosen the act of running, opening up its expressive, communicative and participative possibilities.

Riksteatern: *Run for Your Life*

Of the three running performances discussed in this essay, *Run For Your Life* (2015) adheres most closely to the features of mass participation road races and charity running events. Developed by Paolo Zuccotti, directed by Lisa Färnström of the performing arts collective Troja Scenkonst, and produced by the Swedish National Theatre, Riksteatern, *Run for Your Life* was an activist climate performance that took the form of a live-streamed relay involving thousands of runners. It began in the Swedish mining town of Kiruna in the Arctic Circle and then travelled 4500 kilometres to Paris over a period of twenty-one days, where its arrival coincided with the opening of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21). In Kiruna, the first runner was the Sami 'artivist' Jenni Laiti who offered a stone to be carried to Paris with the words of a Sami poem: 'Take a stone in your hand and close your fist around it until it starts to beat, live, speak and move.' (See Figure 1) Each successive runner, covering an average distance of approximately 4 km, then carried this stone, passing it from hand to hand until it was given to Milan Loeaka, a delegate from the Marshall Islands Pacific Indigenous Network, who carried it with

her into the conference venue in Paris. The act of running together in *Run For Your Life* was inspired by an idea from the artist and human rights activist Haroon Natan for a marathon run in support of refugee rights in Sweden. Natan saw running together as a gesture of solidarity, a means of generating intersubjective energy and an expression of urgency. Adapting Natan's idea, the organizers of *Run For Your Life* used a passage from Naomi Klein's book *This Changes Everything* to emphasize their choice of running as a physical expression of the need for urgency in addressing climate change. Klein describes the words of Lakota educator Henry Red Cloud: 'He tells his students that there are times when we must accept small steps forward - and there are other times "when you need to run like a buffalo." Now is one of those times when we must run.'[34] Along the route of the relay, numerous events were held to coincide with the runners passing. In Sweden alone over 90 events, including seminars, panel discussions, poetry readings, film screenings, circus performances, choirs and concerts, took place.[35]

[34] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 24.
[35] Lisa Färnström, in discussion with the author, 15 March 2019.

Figure 1: Jenni Laiti presents the stone to the camera in a still from the live stream of Run For Your Life. Runforyourlife, Riksteatern Jenni Laiti, Run for your life, first runner, Youtube, 10 November 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZR6kGNM_L0> [accessed 4 March 2019].

As an event, *Run For Your Life* performed a gesture of urgent transmission, carrying a message of climate justice across bodies, territory and media. But at the scale of each participating runner, the act of running functioned as a mode of embodied commitment and presence. In this, *Run For Your Life* echoed the implicit gesturality of mass participation and charity running events. Outside the context of artistic intervention, large running events possesses a gestural dimension through the way race organizers carefully compose the spectacle of massed runners surging along specially designed courses, while media coverage encourages individual runners to narrativize their participation and to author their appearance through clothing, costume and behaviour. The experience of training for, participating in and

completing a race event, offers a powerful sense of individual achievement, as well as an experience of connection with others and urban marathons and road races can be read as forms of ritual-like procession, which provide runners with an arena for the display of purposeful individualized action.[36] Since the 1980s, a strong association between endurance running and fundraising for charitable causes has developed, and it is now common for runners to participate in races as a way of raising money in support of a chosen cause and for charities to organize athletic events to raise funds. Cancer Research UK's annual 5km Race For Life events are a high-profile example where participants dress up in pink and wear signs pinned to their backs that state their personal reasons for participation. These signs name friends or family who are ill, or memorialize those lost to the disease. At a personal level, running a race and raising money for medical research can provide a sense of agency or empowerment in the face of disease. But the widespread coupling of charitable fundraising with athletic events also operates as a mechanism of governance to promote ideals of citizenship and civic participation.[37] Discussing the annual Race for the Cure events held in the United States by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Samantha L. King argues that mass participation charity races contribute to the production of responsible, active citizens and also manage 'to offer large groups of people the feeling that [they] can and do make a difference in shaping the organization, direction, aspirations, and ideals of the nation-state in

[36] See Helmuth Berking and Sighard Neckel, 'Urban Marathon: The Staging of Individuality as an Urban Event', *Theory, Culture & Society* 10 (1993): 76.
[37] See Samantha J. King, 'Doing Good by Running Well: Breast Cancer, the Race for the Cure, and New Technologies of Ethical Citizenship', In *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*, edited by Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy, 295–316. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

which they live.'[38] *Run For Your Life* relied on this entanglement of athletic and civic participation for its own legibility as a gesture and for the sense it provided individual participants that this was a meaningful action to undertake in promoting coordinated global action to address climate change. As a relay that linked individual runners into a continuous chain from the Arctic to Paris, *Run For Your Life* also exhibited some of the features of the more communally grounded bi-annual *Korrika* ('Running') relay, run in support of the Basque language. The *Korrika* is a non-stop relay over eleven days, that traverses over 2000 kilometres with a *testigo* (baton) passed from runner to runner. The testigo carries a message that is read at the beginning and end of the *Korrika*, and large crowds of participants accompany each bearer of the testigo. In Teresa del Valle's reading, *Korrika* operates as a ritual of continuity between past and present and between disparate territories and communities as it passes through the Basque Country.[39] It expresses transmission, the passing on of the Basque language, and the use of running as a mode of transport grounds it in the energies of living bodies.

[38] Ibid., 297.
[39] Teresa del del Valle, *Korrika: Basque Ritual For Ethnic Identity*, trans. by Linda White (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994).

Figure 2: Run For Your Life passes through Stockholm. Photo: Simon Hastegård/Bildbyrån.

In *Run For Your Life* running was rendered gestural not through interruption or inoperability, but through re-framing and recontextualizing it. This was achieved through live-streaming the progress of the chain of runners to the web via a dedicated website throughout its twenty one day duration.[40] Like many spectators, I witnessed the live stream rather than encountering what was a constantly moving physical event. On the live stream, each runner was visible in real time, filmed from a moving vehicle travelling in front of them. Runners were framed facing the viewer, with the camera recording the passage of each runner as they moved along roads, lanes and tracks. The live sound of road noise and their footfalls and conversation

[40] For a short compilation video of *Run for Your Life*, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqa6gV1xICA> [accessed 4 March 2019].

was mixed with a series of softly rhythmic musical compositions that gently emphasized continuity and movement. Each runner's name was listed on the screen as they ran, along with their location, the approximate distance to Paris remaining, and a one sentence summary of the reason why they were running (See Figure 1). Before the event runners provided longer written and recorded statements which could be accessed via the live-stream, allowing me to listen to their voices as I watched them. Some discussed their understanding of climate science and its implications; some raised issues of global injustice; some expressed their concerns about ecological destruction. One German family ran because their home would soon be compulsorily purchased to make way for the expansion of an open cut lignite mine. In many locations runners travelled alone or in pairs or small groups. In towns and cities large groups of runners accumulated, some in costume, some with banners (See Figure 2). At times, the running wasn't even running; 'running was sometimes more passionate walking', observed Paolo Zuccotti.[41] Between Malmö and Copenhagen the stone even travelled by train. The digital mode of encounter with the performance, and the varied pace of the runners, altered the kinesthetic impact of their action significantly. Rather than feel the physical expenditure of energy one might in an athletics competition, or the massed excitement of a crowded fun run, on the screen the runners were distanced objects of contemplation. Held within the frame of the camera, what mattered was their presence and their commitment to moving forward. The knowledge that what I was witnessing was being streamed live, and that the epic scale of the event as a whole

[41] Paolo Zuccotti, in discussion with the author, 15 March 2019.

rested on the contribution of each of the individual runners I saw, made it tremendously affecting. At different times of the day and night I tuned into the relay, watching it like slow television. For its duration it became a kind of ongoing background to my daily life.

The epic scale and duration of *Run For Your Life* sat in tension with the focus on individual runners and the stated aim of giving climate change 'a body, a face and a story'.[42] The contemplative, even meditative, nature of the live stream also sat in tension with the hectic pace and intensity of the physical relay. Lisa Färnström described the relay as a 'logistical mountain' with a scale that was 'crazy'.[43] The clear danger in *Run For Your Life* was that the logistics of producing the event would overwhelm its relational dimension. But the construction of the event out of a succession of individual acts of running, each clearly framed by that individual's reasons for participating, and further contextualized within the larger message of encouraging urgent action to address climate change, illustrated the necessary relationship between committed individual action and collectively organized endeavour.

All the Queens Men: *Fun Run*

[42] Riksteatern, 'Sami Artists First out in the World's Largest Climate Performance - Run for Your Life', press release, 8 December 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151208090830/http://www2.runforyourlife.nu/sv/pressmeddelande-samiska-konstnarer-forst-ut-i-varldens-storsta-klimatperformance/> [accessed 14 March 2019].
[43] Färnström, discussion.

If *Run For Your Life* closely paralleled existing running event formats, amplifying their implicit gesturality, *Fun Run*, by Australian participatory arts company All The Queens Men, plays with and parodies them.[44] *Fun Run* features a lone runner – the artist Tristan Meecham – confined to a treadmill and engaged in an act of endurance: running the full distance of the modern marathon (26 m 385 yds or 42.195 km) while positioned at the centre of an ostentatious, camp public spectacle: 'a bonkers block party' with a pumping soundtrack, lights, video screen, back up dancers, and hundreds of volunteer community collaborators.[45] *Fun Run* stages a real act of athletic endurance as the heart of a large-scale, overtly theatrical, public spectacle. Here the gestural action chain of running is also maintained, being 'endured and supported' by Meecham's moving body over an extended duration. But rather than serving as an end in itself, or as a means towards an end, in *Fun Run* the action of running operates as means for the duration it is undertaken. Over the course of five hours, Meecham runs the distance of the marathon, enduring the very real rigours such a feat imposes on his body. But, confined to the treadmill throughout, he literally goes nowhere.

[44] All The Queen's Men is a collaboration between Tristan Meecham and Bec Reid. For further information on the company, see: <https://allthequeensmen.net>

[45] Bec Reid in Arts Centre Melbourne, *Fun Run 2017 | Arts Centre Melbourne*, Youtube, 1 August 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0qNUkDCKh4&t> [accessed 3 August 2017].

Figure 3: Fun Run, Arts Centre Melbourne, Australia, 2017. Photo: Bryony Jackson.

Performed in public squares and plazas in festival contexts, *Fun Run* is infectiously and subversively silly, inviting participation, and celebrating physical culture in all its diversity.[46] The action of running a marathon offers a recognizable genre for a durational public performance and *Fun Run* invites the sorts of behaviours associated with spectating at urban running events. Marathons, fun runs and charity events typically attract large crowds who gather to witness the spectacle and offer support to runners as they pass. The support comes in the form of applause, shouts of encouragement and offers of food, and this behaviour is often encouraged by race organizers. In *Fun Run* an event MC frequently reiterates that

[46] *Fun Run* was first performed in Melbourne, Australia at the Next Wave Festival in 2010. It has since been performed in Australia, Finland, South Korea and Taiwan. I saw *Fun Run* at the ANTI Festival in Kuopio, Finland in 2015.

Meecham needs our support, and the participation of volunteer performers and spectators – as I discuss further below – is consciously framed in terms of support. *Fun Run* also taps into public interest in feats of record-breaking endurance and the links between civic displays of athleticism and fundraising for charitable causes. The staging of Meecham on a treadmill in public resembles ultramarathon runner Dean Karnazes' publicity-seeking world-record endurance running attempts. In 2007, for example, Karnazes attempted to break the world 24-hour distance record by running on a treadmill prominently installed on the balcony of the Reuters Building in Times Square, New York. Karnazes used his record attempt to raise money for prostate cancer research and promote an energy drink. Meecham's more modest marathon attempt seeks to attract the attention and involvement of the passing public through its epic narrative framing, and its self-consciously hyperbolic combination of branding, costuming, choreography, soundtrack and visual spectacle.

In *Fun Run*, Meecham's running is framed as a retelling of the story of Pheidippides, the legendary original marathon runner, who famously ran to Athens after the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE to announce the Athenian victory over the invading Persian army.[47] At the beginning of the performance, Meecham is transported to the stage in a heroic procession involving his dance entourage – the 'Haus Da Fun Run' – and other volunteer participants drawn from a variety of local sporting and cultural organizations. He then narrates the events leading up to the Battle of Marathon, and introduces the figure of the messenger Pheidippides.

[47] In fact, very little is known about the historical Pheidippides. John A Lucas summarizes: 'The whole marathon race is commemorative of a legend of doubtful authenticity.' John A. Lucas, 'A History of the Marathon Race: 490 B.C. to 1975', *Journal of Sport History*, 3.2 (1976): 120–38.

Pheidippides, as Meecham explains, was first called on to run to Sparta (a distance of approximately 150 miles from Athens) to seek their military support when the Persians invaded Greece. He then ran back to Athens with the message that Sparta would not come to the aid of the Athenians, and then fought in the battle itself. Recounting the victory of the outnumbered Athenian army, Meecham concludes:

> Our hero Pheidippides was again called up. He was to run to Athens to carry the news of the victory. Despite having run to Sparta and back. Despite having fought all morning in heavy armour. Despite the 26 miles to Athens, Pheidippides rose to the challenge. Pushing himself past normal limits of human endurance, her reached Athens in three hours. He delivered his message. He died on the spot. *FUN RUN IS HIS STORY*![48]

After a moment of silence to start the treadmill, and accompanied by the strains of Vangelis' *Chariots of Fire*, Meecham then begins to run.

In re-telling the story of Pheidippides through running a marathon, Meecham's performance is doubly citational: it is a re-enactment of Pheidippides' original marathon and the efforts of countless modern recreational, charity and celebrity marathon runners since. This citationality marks the similarity and difference of Meecham's running to these other acts, allowing it to perform as both critical gesture and playful act. Swathed in gold when he first appears in the procession, Meecham runs on the treadmill in tight orange lycra shorts, aviator

[48] *Fun Run*, performance by All The Queens Men, 4 September 2015, Kuopio, Finland.

sunglasses and a wrap-around microphone. With him onstage, an MC directs proceedings and a DJ and VJ operate non-stop sound and light displays. Led by collaborator Bec Reid, the Haus Da Fun Run also flank him throughout, performing routines at pre-arranged intervals, and interacting with spectators. These overblown signifiers of pop star celebrity sit at odds with the ordinary nature of Meecham's own athletic feat, undermining its seriousness. He might indeed be running an actual marathon, but the very popularity of marathon running means it is no longer an extraordinary act. As Jean Baudrillard observed of the runners in the New York Marathon: 'there are too many of them and their message has lost all meaning'.[49]

What happens in *Fun Run*, and what is at stake in this act of art running, is the way it serves as a catalyst for a whole range of celebratory body-cultural displays, both staged and spontaneous. Over the five hours of the performance different groups of volunteers are called onstage to support Meecham in completing his marathon. In any given performance a spectrum of local line dancers, fencers, percussionists, trampolinists, traditional and cultural dance troupes, pole dancers, cheer leaders, hip hop artists, martial artists, triathletes, and Cross Fitters might be called to the stage. Some of these groups are highly polished, displaying virtuosic skill, but many are recognisably amateurs, performing routines that express their enthusiasm or display bodies in the process of becoming skilled. At the 2015 ANTI Festival in Kuopio, young boxers and Karate students put on training displays, alternating with line dancers, Kendo fighters and spin bikers (see Figure 4). A further

[49] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London & New York: Verso, 1988,), 19.

element is a pre-arranged flash mob – an 'Athenian Dancing Army'. Recruited in the weeks before the performance, the flash mob participants learn a dance routine which they perform once an hour with Haus Da Fun Run. Finally, there are also spectators, who find themselves drawn in by the spectacle and moving to the beat.

Figure 4: Kendo practitioners, spin bike riders, and the dancers of Haus Da Fun Run perform during Fun Run at the ANTI Festival in Kuopio, Finland, in 2015. Photo: author.

In *Fun Run*, marathon running is enacted gesturally as a means through which a celebratory community event might be enacted. While Meecham's individual act of running is certainly directed towards an ends, what is more important is its duration as means. While Meecham runs the event continues, and his constant running presence over five hours means that he frequently fades into the background

despite being positioned centre stage, re-appearing in more introspective moments when the machinery of the stage fades and the focus shifts to his physical struggle. Meecham is not a professional athlete and *Fun Run* allows for moments when the difficulty of the marathon is made evident through his increasing physical exertion, raising the possibility that he might fail in his attempt (notably, though, Meecham has never failed to finish). The 'acting otherwise' performed by Meecham is that of bearing the movement of running whilst travelling nowhere, and through this opening up a space for others to experience their moving bodies in public. The degree to which emphasis is placed on supporting Meecham also suggests the mutual interdependence that sustains the event as a whole. The volunteer community participants and spectators support Meecham, but he too supports the event as he sustains and bears the action of running. *Fun Run's* vision is certainly utopian and could be read as overly reliant on the production of consensus through its feel-good party atmosphere. Certainly, as a peripatetic festival work, it lacks a firm grounding in the differing material and cultural realities of the locations it visits. But it also offers a model of physical activity and body-cultural athleticism grounded in mutuality, collaboration and unashamed fun and provides a context for reflecting on mainstream configurations of sport and exercise.[50] In playfully subverting the heroic figure of the solo marathon runner, *Fun Run* questions the obsession with achievement in mainstream running cultures and opens the stage to other bodies,

[50] Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 58-9, 61. Harvie identifies how socially engaged performance can model existing social relations and offer contexts for reflection, critique and resistance

celebrating a diverse range of physical practices and offering a positive social vision of bodily experience, play and pleasure.

Eddie Ladd: *Ras Goffa Bobby Sands / The Bobby Sands Memorial Race*

While *Fun Run* uses a treadmill to stage a real act of endurance at the heart of a public spectacle, Welsh performance artist Eddie Ladd explores how running on a treadmill might be negotiated choreographically. In *Ras Goffa Bobby Sands / The Bobby Sands Memorial Race* (2009), Ladd performs running otherwise by exploring how the gestural action chain of running can be choreographically deconstructed on a moving surface. Performing on and around a twelve-foot treadmill, Ladd uses running to retrace Irish Republican prisoner Bobby Sands' participation in the hunger strikes of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and eventual death after sixty-six days on hunger strike in March 1981. Ladd worked with Welsh experimental theatre company Brith Gof in the 1990s, and her own work since has often combined movement, dance and intermediality to explore the resistance and survival of Welsh-speaking culture in the face of colonialism and cultural imperialism. The solo piece *Ras Goffa Bobby Sands / The Bobby Sands Memorial Race* originated with Ladd's discovery that Sands was a keen runner in his earlier years and that a race named after him was run annually in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is based on a short essay that Sands wrote while in prison, 'The Loneliness of a Long distance Cripple', in

which he compares his earlier athletic prowess to his physically degraded state in prison.[51]

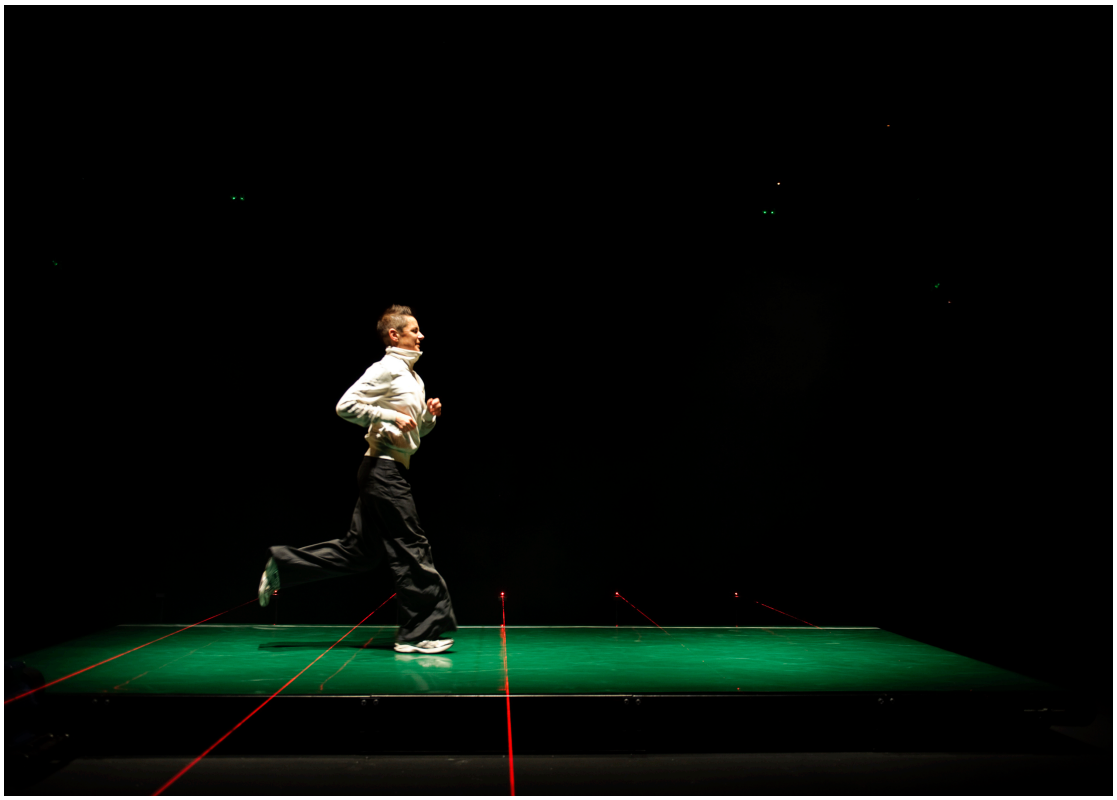

Figure 5: Eddie Ladd, Ras Goff Bobby Sands / The Bobby Sands Memorial Race, 2009. Photo: Keith Morris.

As a piece of physical theatre, *Ras Goffa Bobby Sands / The Bobby Sands Memorial Race* provides a startling image of endurance and exhaustion through choreographically breaking down a running body. Central to this is the interaction between Ladd's movement and the moving surface of the treadmill, augmented by an the electro-acoustic score by Guto Puw and a responsive sound environment by Nick Rothwell and Giles Parbury. At the beginning of the piece Ladd circles the

[51] Bobby Sands, *Writings from Prison / Bobby Sands.* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998).

treadmill before bursting onto it, in a display of athletic vigor. Drifting forward and back over the smooth endlessness of the treadmill's moving surface, Ladd runs while a male voice narrates Sands' own recollection of winning a race at the age of 14. Strongly lit against a dark background, Ladd's profiled stance, the whirring of the treadmill and her intensifying rhythmic footfalls draw attention to her strength and form. As the performance continues, Sands' imprisonment in Long Kesh and H Block is described via more constricted movements. A series of sensor-beams cut across the treadmill, carving up the space into segments. Ladd crawls under the beams, breaking them and triggering discordant sound effects. She paces the length of the treadmill, working with and against its moving surface. Interviews with fellow prisoner Lawrence McKeown and Sands' biographer Denis O'Leary help to describe the blanket protests that started in 1976. The first hunger strike of Winter 1980 is signified with the laying of a line of salt, after which Ladd proceeds to walk purposefully, striding out in response to the treadmill's increasing pace, before she breaks into a jog and then a run. The speed of the treadmill increases further, as does the volume of the soundscape, reaching a high pitch of intensity that feels unsustainable. Ladd's running action starts to disintegrate: her upper body stiffens, her stride loosens, her legs fall out of phase, and her weight shifts laterally. The upper surface of her feet begin to catch on the treadmill, causing her to stumble, then crawl and roll, drag herself forwards along the still-moving surface. The end of the hunger strike comes when she crawls off the front of the treadmill into the darkness.

Over the duration of the performance, Ladd's deconstruction of the action chain of running and her performance of the loss of bodily control offers an image of

increasingly exhausted resistance. The representation of the second hunger strike of Spring 1981 intensifies and elongates the struggle against the relentless forward motion of the machine. Here the fluid action of running only appears fleetingly, as Ladd's movement largely dwells in the disjointedness and unsteadiness of a weakened, starving body. Ladd uses the travel afforded by the treadmill to arrest her movement in sudden moments of stillness, and gradually descends towards its surface into circling, rolling, crawling. She lies prone and then struggles to regain an upright posture once more. Ladd performs the disarticulation of bodily movement and the loss of alignment and rhythm in a durational image of bodily breakdown, struggling to remain on the moving surface. This carries on until the treadmill ceases to move and Ladd again crawls into darkness and death. I still carry a sense of how unbearably wearying it was to witness the live performance in Ceredigion's Theatr Felinfach, and the kinesthetic implication of my own spectating body in Ladd's struggle, mediated by my own experiences of marathon training at the time, evoked strong feelings of muscular fatigue. While the specific kinesthetic impact of Ladd's performance no doubt differed for other spectators, the embodied reality of her prolonged struggle with and against the moving surface offered the possibility of implicating spectators kinesthetically in the performance's politics of resistance and refusal.

Ladd uses the apparatus of the treadmill to perform running otherwise: breaking it down choreographically into lateral drift, stumbling, falling, rolling and scrambling. Suspended on the moving treadmill the action of running becomes a gesture of determined resistance that descends into exhaustion. Stephen Greer reads Ladd's performance as exhibiting a logic of 'voluntary involuntariness' in which

Ladd subjects herself performatively to the treadmill and 'is forced to keep pace if she wants the performance to continue and avoid being swept onto the floor.'[52] As a scenographic conceit, the apparatus of the treadmill provides a moving surface which draws out of Ladd a performance that is both a theatrical rendering of endurance and yet also requires real exertion. The performance therefore renders running gestural through operating somewhere between a representation of endurance and a presentation of the 'real' act, and between running and other forms of choreographed forward motion.

Performing Running

Performance provides a key site for exploring the gestural possibilities of athletic cultures and playing with the potential for the differential performance of bodily techniques. In the emerging interdisciplinary field of 'running studies' the concept of gesture also offers a way of doing things performatively with running. When bodies perform the act of running, the form, image or spectacle of athletic action generates affective textures that implicate us in the effort and invite us to become more aware of our own embodied situation. The invitation to engage with running bodies kinesthetically opens up a space for relation and response. The uses of running in the performances discussed in this essay are motived by very different impulses, but each brings running into being as gesture so as to recontextualize running bodies and open up their expressive potential. These performances also display a shared

[52] Stephen Greer, *Queer Exceptions: Solo Performance in Neoliberal Times* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 67.

interest in articulating relationships between the individual and the collective through adopting the form of either the relay or the race.

What is at stake when bodies run as art is the possibility of bringing running into being differently, either through the action of the artist's own running body or through the invitation extended to others to run. Through her concept of the *gestural performative*, Noland argues that gesture is both constitutive of subjectivity and culture, and that it is a site for the production of difference: 'on the one hand, gesturing can performatively bring a body into being; on the other, the performing body can critically bring a gesture into being, one that draws from the body's ability to differentiate, swerve, and remark'.[53] Viewed through the lens of Noland's conception of gesture, the performance of running can reveal or generate an experience of the body in movement which sits in tension with established social meanings. Whether the gestural action chain of running is interrupted or left intact, when the action of running migrates across different bodies and situations, gestural play enables alteration in performance and meaning. It is in this that the performative potential of running art can be most clearly seen: performing running as art is a way of generating encounters with the experience of movement. And such encounters matter because they open running up to a broader range of bodies and abilities by extending possibilities for physical participation and expression.

The significance of performative interventions into running and its various cultures therefore lies in their ability to contribute to the development of body-cultural athletic practices that refuse to be pigeonholed within the bounds of

[53] Noland, 212.

competitive sport's 'achievement ideology'.[54] In emerging dialogues between the worlds of sport and exercise and art, a focus on the sensuous aesthetics of physical activities is a vital means of transforming the experience of physical activity and widening its possibilities.[55] Despite the emergence of post-sport physical cultures, sport and exercise remain fields that are dominated by rational and practical attitudes that privilege health and achievement-related reasons for participation, and therefore narrow the concept of what physical activity is and why it might be undertaken.[56] In addition, mainstream achievement-oriented sporting cultures are seemingly inflexible, offering clearly defined scripts for events, imposing strict gender segregation, and exercising an anxious concern with what bodies are rather than what they do.[57] It is in this context of sport's limitations that performance can intervene by creating new and novel situations in which the expressive and communicative capacities of athletic gestures might be explored and experienced.

[54] Bale, 130.
[55] See Matti Tainio, 'Contemporary Physical Activities: The Aesthetic Justification' and Lynn Froggett, 'Participant Experience in Art-Sport: Additive? Interactive? Transformative?', *Sport in Society* 22.5 (2019): 754–71.
[56] Matti Tainio, 'Contemporary Physical Activities: The Aesthetic Justification': 856.
[57] Doyle, 423.